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OES/STC (PBATES); OES/IHA (DSINGER AND NCOMELLA)
BANGKOK FOR RMO, CDC, USAID/RDM/A (MFRIEDMAN AND JMACARTHUR)
USDA FOR FAS/PASS TO APHIS
DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE FOR OSD/ISA/AP (LSTERN)
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SUBJECT: VIETNAM: AVIAN INFLUENZA WEEKLY REPORT FOR DECEMBER
22, 2005

REF: Hanoi 3287

1. (U) Summary. There have been no new human Avian Influenza (AI) deaths in Vietnam since October 29. The number of animal AI affected provinces in Vietnam continues to drop from a high of 21 in mid-November to 13 this week. With AI "in check" in recent weeks and consumer confidence rebounding slightly, the sale of poultry products and eggs has increased and they are now available in many supermarkets. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) hosted an AI briefing for the diplomatic community on December 19 and Post has obtained an updated copy of the Ministry of Health's (MOH) National Plan of Action on Human Influenza Pandemic Prevention and Control. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service provided training to 20 Vietnamese laboratory technicians in a new, more efficient technique for detecting AI in poultry. The Government of Vietnam (GVN) also tested its AI response system again, conducting its second major bird flu exercise in Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) on December 18 with over 1,000 participants from the government and health sector. End Summary.

AI SNAPSHOT

2. (U) As of December 21, 2006:

--Number of New Human AI Cases in Vietnam since October 29:
Zero
--Current Number of Provinces still affected by AI in
poultry: 13
--Estimated number of poultry culled since October 1: 3.6
million

GVN GIVES CONCISE AI BRIEFING

3. (U) MOFA hosted an AI briefing for the diplomatic community about the GVN's AI and pandemic preparedness efforts on December 19. Representatives from Australia, Canada, European Union, Germany, Norway, Algeria, United States and the United Kingdom were present, among others.

4. (U) Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) Vice Minister Bui Ba Bong stressed that the GVN has committed its leadership and political will to combat AI by following international standards (e.g., WHO, FAO); providing greater transparency in the detection process; cooperating with regional and international actors; and recognizing the importance of public information and education campaigns. Vice Minister Bong listed eight measures that the GVN is currently undertaking to control AI in poultry, including: 1) surveillance and reporting; 2) improving AI diagnostic capacity; 3) culling infected birds and birds in high risk areas; 4) disinfecting infected areas; 5) controlling poultry movement; 6) vaccinations; 7) restructuring the poultry production process; and, 8) restructuring the poultry slaughtering and marketing systems.

5. (U) According to Vice Minister Bong, the GVN is encouraged by the overall decline of AI poultry outbreaks since their peak in mid-November. He explained that AI poultry outbreaks have occurred earlier in this year's winter season compared to two years ago, and added that this year provinces in the North have borne the brunt of the outbreaks. He explained that provinces in southern Vietnam carried out their poultry vaccination programs and implemented strict regulations earlier than their northern neighbors because the South was heavily hit by AI poultry outbreaks last year.

6. (U) MOH's National Institute of Hygiene and Epidemiology (NIHE) Preventive Medicine Department officials Nguyen Van

Binh and Nguyen Tran Hien provided an update on MOH's AI control activities. According to Binh, out of the 66 AI cases in Vietnam, 97 percent contracted the disease by either direct poultry contact or possibly by eating ill poultry. Binh stressed that transmitting H5N1 AI from poultry to human is "very difficult and many people in high risk groups (breeders, slaughterers, veterinarians) do not get the disease." The NIHE officials summarized the preventive measures being undertaken by the GVN, including, among others, stockpiling Tamiflu (NOTE: Binh confirmed that the GVN has 400,000 doses. END NOTE) and strengthening laboratory capacity and surveillance.

MOH PREPAREDNESS PLAN

17. (U) Post recently received an updated copy of MOH's National Plan of Action on Human Influenza Pandemic Prevention and Control in Vietnam dated November 2005. The 54-page document is a detailed plan of action for government and health agencies in all levels (national, provincial and local/commune) in case of an AI outbreak and pandemic. The Plan has six parts: 1) Influenza Overview; 2) Assessment of Influenza A (H5N1) Epidemic; 3) Objectives and Solutions by Influenza Pandemic Phases; 4) Organization of Implementation from central level to local level; 5) Estimated Budget, and; 6) Appendices, including diagrams on the Influenza Surveillance System in Vietnam and Influenza A (H5N1) Treatment Network. The Plan states that the "estimated budget for health activities in case there is an outbreak of human influenza pandemic is around 17,000 billion VND" or USD 1.06 billion. It is anticipated that this version of the National Plan will be combined with MARD's AI Plan and combined plans will be presented at the Beijing Donor's Meeting in mid-January. (NOTE: Post has emailed the document to EAP/MLS. END NOTE)

EMBASSY'S WORK ON AI

18. (U) As part of a three-country mission, a delegation sponsored by the CDC Influenza Branch visited Hanoi December 14-18 to discuss projects to be funded by the 2005 Tsunami Supplemental appropriations. The team met with WHO, NIHE, CARE International, World Bank Health Team and Embassy officials. The team included a medical epidemiologist selected by CDC who may be positioned in Vietnam to provide technical assistance to Vietnam's national and regional (and possibly provincial) laboratories on influenza issues.

19. (U) The Health Attache met with the Japan International Cooperation Agency's (JICA) consultation team to discuss their plans for a Biosafety Level 3 (BSL3) laboratory in NIHE. The team explained that JICA's assistance will include the design, construction and equipping the BSL3 laboratory. JICA's team will provide the technical assistance component in the form of biosafety training, assistance in writing national regulations for operating biosafety level laboratories, training technicians to diagnose and work with pathogenic microorganisms in a BSL3 laboratory. This project will begin in January 2006 when the construction consultation team will be in Hanoi. The JICA team also reported that Japan's Ministry of Science and Education is supporting the placement of a researcher from Nagasaki University to work on AI and flaviviruses.

110. (U) In January, 2006, the National Institute for Allergy and Infectious Diseases, a part of the National Institute of Health, will send to Hanoi two specialists in laboratory design and construction to consult with NIHE. They will provide assistance in designing the non-BSL3 component of the research laboratory, which will also house NIHE's BSL3 lab.

USDA PROVIDES AI DIAGNOSIS TRAINING

111. (U) USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service provided training to 20 Vietnamese laboratory technicians in a new, more efficient technique for detecting AI in poultry. Two U.S. experts conducted the training on Real-Time PCR diagnosis at the National Center for Veterinary Diagnosis in Hanoi December 14-21. The course stressed hands-on training using equipment and supplies brought from the United States. The equipment was then donated to the Vietnamese Government. This training and equipment combined with further equipment donations expected in January from the World Bank and a United Nation's special joint fund to fight AI will allow Department of Animal Health to greatly increase the speed of AI detection, greatly strengthening Vietnam's ability to combat the disease. The total value of the U.S. training and donated equipment is approximately USD 100,000.

HCMC'S SECOND AI EXERCISE

12. (U) Ho Chi Minh City held its second AI outbreak exercise on December 18. The two-hour event involved approximately 1,000 representatives of the Ministry of Health, various HCMC provincial officials, health workers and civilians. The simulated AI outbreak took place in HCMC's Cu Chi District and according to press reports, Minister of Health Tran Thi Trung Chien oversaw the exercise to raise public awareness and to test the GVN's response to an AI outbreak.

CHICKEN AND EGGS ARE BACK!

12. (U) Poultry products and eggs are making a comeback to store shelves and consumers are eagerly buying them. With the decrease in the number of provinces being affected by AI, the poultry industry has been gearing up its sales tactics in the last week and offering Vietnamese consumers with "virus-free" poultry and eggs. During the December 18 MOFA AI briefing, the British Ambassador asked whether or not eating chickens was safe and NIHE officials responded by saying that poultry is indeed safe to eat if it is properly slaughtered, cleaned and bought from a trusted source. MARD is conducting inspections to make sure the conditions are met. Interestingly, NIHE's Binh stressed that the MOH has "never" said that it not safe to eat chicken if it is properly prepared.

MARINE